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Billy's Woes Rub Off On the President

Senators' criticism of the way the White House handled the Billy Carter affair threatens to feed public doubts about the President just when he needs them least—near the peak of a tough re-election drive.

A 249-page study, issued by a nine-member subcommittee on October 2, said President Carter and his aides violated no laws in their contacts with Billy during his dealings with terrorist Libya.

But among the group's five Democrats, Senator Max Baucus of Montana cited "a series of disturbing judgment calls," and Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont said "the President was ill-served by those around him."

Republicans pointed to the findings as a reason why Carter should be defeated on November 4. Senator Richard G. Lugar of Indiana said the report "will raise doubts about whether the President's relationship with his brother was a tawdry and bizarre business." Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland complained of a "perception of a lack of competence in the administration." Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina said the study indicated "a clear pattern of misconduct."

The nine-week inquiry started after Billy registered as a foreign agent and disclosed that Libya had loaned him \$220,000. The senators said the Justice

Department showed no favoritism to Billy by not prosecuting him. But they also found that—

- Carter should have stated much earlier that Billy "did not represent the U.S. and that the Libyans should not expect to gain any influence . . . by cultivating their relations with him."

- The White House was "ill-advised" to use Billy as a contact with Libya during an effort to win release of U.S. hostages in Iran, because that boosted his stature in Libya's eyes.

- National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Central Intelligence

Agency chief Stansfield Turner and Atty. Gen. Benjamin Civiletti mishandled intelligence data about Billy.

- Billy "merits severe criticism" for not telling his brother that he was trying to profit from his Libyan ties.

Carter's aides dismissed the report's impact. Said one: "The Senate found nothing illegal. If they can't come up with anything better than that, the President won't be hurt."

A White House statement pictured Carter as still feeling that he had done nothing wrong. "Even in the light of hindsight," the statement said, "the President respectfully differs with the subcommittee's views."

But a day before the Senate report came out, Carter acknowledged that relatives could cause problems. In a memo to government agencies, he cautioned federal employees against dealing with his family members "in ways that create either the reality or the appearance of impropriety." □

